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Any search for continuity in American thought presupposes causality in intellectual history. That is, ideas are not generated in a vacuum; rather, ideas develop from other ideas to form a continuous pattern of cause and effect. As a result, one dimension of intellectual history is concerned with how these developing ideas fit together. John Higham writes: "Let us say, then, that intellectual history is first of all a branch of history, one variety of a species, sharing the general characteristics that distinguish historical knowledge. As such, it has an overriding concern with how and why particular human experiences have followed one another through time."[1]

The first overriding concern of this essay is to isolate and examine the thread of continuity stretching between the particular human experiences of Benjamin Franklin and William James. Despite being separated by over 100 years, Franklin, in his *Autobiography,* and James, in *Pragmatism,* share certain philosophical commonalities that suggest the cause and effect pattern that characterizes intellectual history. By showing how Franklin's philosophy can be analyzed through the prism of James' pragmatism, we can see that a thread of continuity links various tenets of the two philosophies. Namely, both Franklin and James' philosophies (1) mediate between science and religion (or empiricism and rationalism); (2) must be defined, of course, as pragmatic; (3) demonstrate a distrust of abstraction and metaphysical dogmatism, (4) can be characterized by their changing nature; and (5) are distinguished by their future-oriented approach.

The second concern, then, is to trace the trajectory of that thread of continuity as it stretches beyond James straight into the operative philosophy of today: postmodernism. A thread of continuity links postmodernism and James on three specific fronts: First, James exemplifies an extreme pessimism in purely objective

truth. Second, James emphasizes the role human perspective plays in asserting truth claims, thus anticipating postmodern perspectivalism. Third, as a consequence of points one and two, James reposes hope in the facility of genuine conversation between different interpretive communities, a hope shared by many postmodernists today. By tracing this thread of continuity between James and postmodernism, and by methods of association, we are confronted with the extraordinary question: Is Benjamin Franklin, in some miraculous sense, postmodern? Although clearly outlandish, this question is more tenable if phrased more modestly: Do *some* of the tenets of postmodernism exist in *embryonic* form in Franklin's philosophy? Phrased this way, this question might enable us to trace a thread of continuity in American thought that spans nearly two centuries.

According to Bruce Kuklich, a major theme "running through James's writing is the attempt to link the facts of nature and spirit, of science and religion."[2] "Indeed," Kuklich goes on to write, "it is the crucial element in pragmatic philosophy." Throughout *Pragmatism,* James attempts to negotiate between science, or empiricism, on the one hand, and religion, or rationalism, on the other. In fact, the tension produced from this dialectic fuels much of the motivation of James' text and serves to mold pragmatism into a systematic philosophy. The empiricist, according to James, is the "lover of facts in all their crude variety. . . ."[3] The rationalist, on the other hand, is the "devotee to abstract and eternal principles." Charting the middle way between empiricism and rationalism, James proposes his philosophy of pragmatism: "It is at this point that my own solution begins to appear. I offer the oddly-named thing pragmatism as a philosophy that can satisfy both kinds of demand. It can remain religious like the rationalisms, but at the same time, like the empiricisms, it can preserve the richest intimacy with facts."[4]

The fact that Franklin attempts to do something very similar to this — to meld rationalism with empiricism, religion with science — is evidenced in Franklin's reflections on his invention of the wood stove. This invention was the product of an entirely empirical process; to use James' terminology, Franklin, "the lover of facts," invented the wood stove. However, Franklin also had rationalist, or religious, blood running through his veins. Thus, Franklin reflects upon the possibility of approaching religion empirically. Donald H. Meyer puts it this way:

> One could quickly see the advantages of his new wood stove, Franklin had announced in 1744, by investigating the matter for oneself, coming to understand the 'Properties' and the 'Principles' involved, examining them 'separately and particularly,' then make the necessary 'comparisons.' Why cannot something similar be done in the realm of faith?[5]

This question proposes a marriage between science (empiricism, experimentation, etc.) and faith or rationalism. Not unlike James, Franklin seems to be negotiating between the extremes. Like James, Franklin sees validity in both science and faith, empiricism and rationalism. Thus, James and Franklin approach epistemology from a very similar angle that enables them to remain receptive to the divergent truth claims of empiricism and rationalism.

For James, such receptivity to these divergent truth claims clears the philosophical road for pragmatism. By proceeding hand in hand with both empiricism and rationalism, pragmatism is enabled to avoid the pitfalls inherent in each. If monolithic, empiricism, James realizes, will ask questions solely on matters of fact. On the other hand, rationalism, if monolithic, will ask questions solely on first principles and theoretical constructs. By blending these two questions, pragmatic interrogations emerge. James writes:

> Pragmatism, on the other hand, asks its usual question. 'Grant an idea or belief to be true,' it says, 'what concrete difference will its being true make in any one's actual life? How will truth be realized? What experiences will be different from those which would obtain if the belief were false? What, in short, is the truth's case-value in experiential terms?[6]

Unlike rationalism, pragmatism does not rule out many empirical truth claims *a priori*. And unlike empiricism, pragmatism does not rule out many rational truth claims *a priori*. Consequently, since neither rationalism nor empiricism can become monolithic, the fundamental criteria for philosophical legitimacy is a truth claim's utility or consequential benefits. In a uniquely pragmatic move, both rationalism *and* empiricism are allowed into the court of arbitration if they, as Jacques Barzun writes, correspond to the "fitness of further experiences" — that is, if they produce tangible, harmonious experiential benefits.[7] Thus, in the pragmatic paradigm, rationalism and empiricism are given assent if they

produce positive quantifiable results. Any truth claim, whether rationalistic or empirical, is deemed "true" if it is successful on this score. As James writes: "The truth is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite, assignable reasons."[8]

The thread of continuity between Franklin and James becomes more pronounced when we analyze how Franklin, mediating between science and religion, evaluates truth claims based upon James' "assignable reasons." Utilitarian value adjudicates between the claims of science and religion when Franklin evaluates the theology of his day. As with James, Franklin assigns a value to pragmatism that supersedes the status of empirical or rational "truth." Thus, also like James, Franklin gives the nod to measurable consequences when evaluating religious concerns and their implications. Writing of Franklin's theological beliefs, Donald H. Meyer comments: "When the teachings of a sect go beyond the 'truths' we all 'know' they become matters of 'speculation,' and, as such, are to be handled not on the basis of truth or falsity but of social utility or worthlessness, perhaps mischief."[9] For Franklin, then, the criteria of social utility (or worthlessness) hold primacy over any speculative theological truth status (be it empirical or rational).

James exemplifies this same evaluation of speculative theology. Any estimation of a theological claim at the level of speculation must be conducted in terms of utility. James seems to echo Franklin when he writes: "The notion of God . . ., however inferior it may be in clearness to those mathematical notions so current in mechanical philosophy, has at least this practical superiority over them, that it guarantees an ideal order that shall be permanently preserved."[10] Like Franklin, James favors any theological construct that perpetuates social order. Consequently, Franklin implicitly and James explicitly expound a new category of truth that transcends the limitations of strict empiricism and rationalism while, at the same time, not dismissing empiricism and rationalism from the court of appeal. James evidences this new category of truth when he writes: "If theological ideas prove to have a value for concrete life, they will be true, for pragmatism, in the sense of being good for so much."[11] Franklin aligns his beliefs within this same category of truth when he contemplates the theological idea of the divinity of Jesus Christ. Franklin writes that he will accept this belief "if that Belief has the good *Consequence*, as probably it has, of making his

Doctrines more respected and better observed . . ." [emphasis added].[12] Alfred Owen Aldridge perhaps best illustrates the thread of continuity linking Franklin and James when he describes Franklin using James' terminology: "But on the surface Franklin was a pragmatist, advocating beliefs and practices because of their salutary effect upon society."[13]

Closely related to Franklin and James' pragmatism is a pronounced distrust of metaphysical abstraction. Such abstraction tends toward empty rhetoric and casuistry, which bears little relevance to the practical concerns of pragmatism. James, for instance, insists that philosophy is not just abstraction, but, he writes, a "positive connection in life."[14] A pragmatist, James asserts, "turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins."[15] James' discussion of the one and the many illustrates this turning away. He writes:

> 'The world is One!' — the formula may become a sort of number-worship. 'Three' and 'seven' have, it is true, been reckoned sacred numbers, but, abstractly taken, why is 'one' more excellent than 'forty-three,' or than 'two million and ten'? In this first vague conviction of the world's unity, there is so little to take hold of that we hardly know what we mean by it.[16]

Full of sound and fury, "number-worship" and convictions of the world's unity signify nothing. For James, these concepts are nothing more than philosophical fodder for high-brow sophists. More importantly, these concepts contribute little to the pragmatic emphasis on measurable, positive, experiential and societal consequences.

Franklin's aversion to abstraction follows along James' lines. Franklin resists abstraction in order to concentrate on verifiable results. In the *Autobiography*, Franklin discusses his intention of writing an essay entitled "The Art of Virtue": "In this Piece it was my Design to explain and enforce this Doctrine, that vicious Actions are not hurtful because they are forbidden, but forbidden because they are hurtful, the Nature of Man alone consider'd. . . ."[17] Here, Franklin implies his resistance to discussing ethics in terms of abstract ontology. The belief that the forbiddenness of actions precede their viciousness can only be the subject of abstract debate.

What is concrete and knowable is the fact that vicious actions are hurtful. Like James and his attitude toward "number-worship" and the world's unity, Franklin sees no pragmatic merit in philosophizing on the ontological status of ethics. Franklin asserts that he is considering the "Nature of Man" alone; and such considerations are not merely abstract, but concrete and experientially quantifiable.

Concomitant to their distrust of abstraction, Franklin and James censure dogmatism insofar as it thwarts pragmatism. A stubborn, dogmatic position on any singular issue discourages the elasticity that provides pragmatism with much of its efficacy. Pragmatism rarely reposes confidence in an absolute, binding truth claim. For this reason, James disapproves of dogmatic rationalism. He writes: "To treat abstract principles as finalities, before which our intellects may come to rest in a state of admiring contemplation is the great rationalist failing."[18] In a similar manner, Franklin disapproves of such finalities when he prescribes for himself the proper conduct toward his fellow citizens. He states: "I made it a Rule to forbear all direct Contradiction to the sentiments of others, and all positive Assertion of my own. I even forbid myself agreeable to the old Laws of our Junto, the Use of every Word or Expression in the Language that imported a *fix'd* Opinion . . ." [emphasis added].[19] Thus, we might better understand how Franklin's aversion to dogmatic fixed opinions draws him to a particular Presbyterian preacher described in the *Autobiography*. Franklin writes: ". . . I became one of his constant Hearers, his Sermons pleasing me as they had little of the *dogmatical kind*, but inculcated strongly the practice of virtue . . ." [emphasis added].[20] Perhaps Alfred Owen Aldridge speaks for both Franklin and James when he asserts that Franklin opposed "intellectual authoritarianism" and distrusted "metaphysical dogmatism."[21] For James and Franklin, if the desired end is utility and practical consequences, then the means must adapt and self-correct itself to reach those ends. Dogmatism presents an obstacle to this process.

If Franklin and James distrust such dogmatism, and if dogmatism implies static truths, then it naturally follows that their own philosophies will both espouse a quality of an opposite cast. Thus, yet another thread of continuity links Franklin and James in that both of their philosophies are characterized by their changing character. As stated above, if the desired end is utility and practical consequence, then the means must adapt and self-correct itself to

reach those ends. It is clear that both Franklin and James are willing to change their position on an issue and assign and reassign the status of truth to these changing positions accordingly.

The changing character of James' philosophy becomes clear when James articulates the nature of truth. Again, James is searching for practical, beneficial consequences, and if a proposition fulfills these conditions, such a proposition is deemed true. James writes: "A new opinion counts as 'true' just in proportion as it gratifies the individual's desire to assimilate the novel in his experience to his beliefs in stock. . . ."[22] In other words, truth changes as new opinions harmonize with experience in a continually ongoing process that seeks to actualize a positive future. John Roth describes this Jamesian process as "continual revision": "Our awareness of future expectations is not exhaustive, is subject to error, and needs continual revision."[23] This revision, this changeability, enables James to remain flexible as he steers toward his elusive goal of practical consequences.

Since Franklin's *Autobiography* is, to a large extent, episodic, perhaps a good way to illustrate the changing nature of Franklin's philosophy is to recount an episode that exemplifies this changeability. During his voyage to Philadelphia, Franklin resolves to become a vegetarian. Franklin demonstrates that this decision was not whimsical or arbitrary, but, instead, tended toward the philosophical, when he adopts this tenet into a sect (complete with doctrines and sermons) that he establishes with Samuel Keimer.[24] Although Franklin's vegetarian convictions remain firm for a while, the changing nature of his philosophy bears sway when he is confronted with a plate of cod. This fish being his weakness, Franklin rationalizes that since the cod eats smaller fish, he, consequently, should have no objections to eating the cod. He changes, or, in this case, makes an exception to, one tenet of his philosophy. Throughout the *Autobiography*, Franklin's philosophical as well as religious beliefs are subject to such modifications. For this reason, Donald H. Meyer writes that, for Franklin, "Institutions, including religious ones, were the machinery that ran society. They were to be studied, used, repaired when necessary, redesigned, even junked when the circumstances demanded it."[25] Considered in the light of this sentence, the cod incident perhaps serves as a microcosm of the changeable nature of Franklin's philosophy as a whole. In fact, Franklin changed his theological position so many times that many religious

denominations of his day claimed him as their own. John Adams, the second President of the United States, writes: "The Catholics thought him almost a Catholic. The Church of England claimed him as one of them. The Presbyterians thought him half a Presbyterian, and the Friends believed him a wet Quaker."[26]

Although the notion of change can often carry pejorative connotations, forming images of instability or relativism in the mind, Franklin and James concentrate their energies on the hopeful possibilities of change. As a result of his many inventions, political tracts and negotiations, military expeditions, and diplomacy missions, Franklin transformed the course of America by incorporating the concept of change into its vocabulary. Over 100 years before James, Franklin adapted a version of pragmatism that became a *modus operandi* for American success. Kenneth Silverman states that Franklin "incarnated the profoundly American belief that things can be changed."[27] This profoundly American belief, of course, informs James' pragmatism as well. John M. Russell summarizes the fundamental role change plays as well as the potential opportunities it provides when he writes, "Change, in a word, best characterizes reality. Yet our efforts can hasten this changing, unfinished world toward a more fulfilling destiny. According to James, the meaning of our lives involves this very possibility."[28]

Change and its possibilities in creating a fulfilling destiny bring us to the final thread of continuity linking Franklin and James that I shall analyze. Since the consequences of the future are contingent upon the changes made in the present, Franklin and James' philosophies are future-oriented. That is, James and Franklin consider the possibilities of change always with an eye to the future. Future possibilities indelibly color their judgments. This is why James writes that "pragmatism shifts the emphasis and looks *forward* into facts themselves. The really vital question for us all is, What is this world *going* to be? What is life *eventually* to make of itself" [emphasis added]?[29] Jacques Barzun asserts that such forward-looking questions naturally direct the mind to pragmatic thinking. He writes: "When the natural purposiveness of the stream of mind is directed rationally for making sure that an idea is right, the search is 'pragmatic' in the sense that it looks chiefly *to what follows, not backwards to precedent or sideways to an 'original'* " [emphasis added].[30] Franklin evidences this looking-at-what-follows mentality perhaps most poignantly in his essay, "The

Morals of Chess." He contends that the first lesson learned from chess is foresight, which, as he writes, "looks a little into futurity and considers the consequences that may attend an action. . . ."[31] This lesson of foresight factors into nearly every facet of Franklin's accomplishments. Indeed, Franklin's life could serve as the metaphorical text for such a lesson. Thus, like the cod episode described above, the lesson of foresight derived from chess playing forms a sort of microcosm of Franklin as thinker — in this case, a microcosm of Franklin's future-oriented approach to philosophy.

These, then, are just five of the threads of continuity that link Franklin and James. We might also notice how these five threads continually interweave. For example, Franklin and James' mediation between science and religion (or empiricism and rationalism) gives pragmatism its unique character; pragmatism, in turn, in the thought of Franklin and James, depends upon such mediation. Moreover, pragmatism naturally spawns a distrust of abstraction and metaphysical dogmatism. The changing character of Franklin and James' thought, consequently, is contingent upon such distrust. And, to complete this interweaving process, this changing variety of philosophy forces a future-oriented approach to philosophy. All this goes to say that the interweaving of threads serves to strengthen the intellectual ties that link Franklin and James, namely because these interweaving threads are of such a similar pattern. Thus, in terms of intellectual history, these threads supply the evidence that suggests a continuity in American thought spanning over a century.

As mentioned at the outset of this essay, however, this thread of continuity, originating in the thought of Franklin, does not terminate with the philosophy of James. If we follow its trajectory beyond James, we can see that it reattaches itself to central tenets of postmodernism. This is a remarkable phenomenon when we consider the great epistemological divide that separates modernism (a heading under which we must include both Franklin and James) and postmodernism. I refer here to modernism not as a literary phenomenon but as an epistemological phenomenon. Modernism, as I am using the term is synonymous with Enlightenment foundation, which finds its origin in René Descartes. Stretching over such a gaping divide, the thread of continuity is certainly in a precarious position. On the postmodern side of the great epistemological divide lies truth claims (or, perhaps better put, the absence of truth claims) radically different from any modernist

claim. Nancey Murphy addresses the enormous shift in thinking which characterizes postmodernism when she writes: "I often point out to students that they are privileged to live in an unusual and exciting period in intellectual history. Changes as sweeping as those now occurring in the intellectual world happen only rarely — perhaps the most recent such change was 300 years ago, although we need more historical perspective to make sound judgments here."[32] Before exploring how the thread of continuity connects James and the "unusual and exciting" period of postmodernism, a brief explanation of postmodern philosophy is in order. Such a description must begin with postmodernism's favorite villain, Rene Descartes.

In 1637, Rene Descartes ushered in the period known as the Enlightenment with the publication of his *Discourse on Method.* Employing mathematical methods and universal doubt, he sought to break down knowledge and experience to indubitable certainties. The rationalist/foundationalist approach was highly optimistic because it held that truth was "out there" and merely needed to be "discovered." Descartes wrote: ". . . there is only one truth to each thing, whoever finds it knows as much about the thing as there is to be known. . . ."[33] The one truth that Descartes claimed he knew for certain is expressed in the celebrated phrase, *"cogito ergo sum,"* "I think, therefore I am."[34] The search for truth, Descartes maintained, could be built upon this certain and unshakable foundation; the search was furthermore undergirded by the belief that truth was stable and knowable.

Late twentieth-century thinkers turned the Enlightenment on its head when they questioned the very starting point of Descartes' methodology. Descartes claimed to assume nothing when he began his inquiry. Careful to avoid any *a priori* deductions, inductions, or assumptions, Descartes attempted to divest himself of all interpreted data to reach an unquestionable epistemological foundation. But as William Placher writes, uninterpreted data are never truly uninterpreted; inquiries are never conducted without assumptions; and foundationalism is never truly foundational: "Only in the context of assuming *some* things can he question *other* things . . . We cannot build knowledge on a foundation of uninterpreted sense-data, because we cannot know particular sense-data in isolation from the conceptual schemes we use to organize them" [emphasis in original].[35] Those "conceptual schemes" may include the language with which knowledge is

made communicable, the society or culture of which the inquirer is a member, or the historical time period in which the inquirer lives.[36] Epistemological starting points, in other words, cannot be objective. All observations, as Placher writes, are "theory-laden."[37] The result, then, of postmodern/post-Enlightenment thinking is the belief that there exists no universal standard by which we may judge rationality and truth—no Archimedean point of reference. Any understanding of the world is necessarily a *contextualized* understanding.

The move from the deconstruction of rationalism to the deconstruction of empiricism and the scientific method was inevitable. Just as the postmodern rejects Cartesian rationalism on the basis of its claim to objective starting points of inquiry, so the postmodern rejects John Locke's empiricism for similar reasons. The postmodern denial of universal standards of criteria undermines the empiricist's search for definite fact *via* immediate sense-experience. Likewise, the long-cherished objective nature of science and the scientific method, the postmodern claims, is a misnomer. The findings of science do not represent a linear progression toward truth or the way things "really are"; rather, they answer the questions, framed by assumptions, asked by particular scientists of a particular time. Stanley Grenz writes that Einstein's general theory of relativity, Werner Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, and Louis de Broglie's Quantam theory all contribute to undermine the certitude reposed in the Enlightenment project and its appeal to the scientific method. He writes "According to the new understanding, scientific knowledge is not a compilation of objective universal truths but a collection of research traditions borne by particular communities of inquirers."[38] Thus, scientific truth claims cannot be divorced from the scientist who made them, empirical truth claims cannot be divorced from the empiricist who made them, and rational truth claims cannot be divorced from the rationalist who made them. In addition, to claim that anything is scientifically, empirically, or rationally true is an Enlightenment/modern move that the postmodern would reject categorically. As Stephen T. Davis writes, in postmodernism, "There is no such thing as objectivity; everybody approaches reality with certain commitments and interests."[39] Truth claims, as mentioned previously, are simply answers to questions framed by assumptions. Perhaps we can summarize the postmodern position in the words of Hans-Georg Gadamer: "I believe one can say in

principle: There can be no proposition that is purely and simply true."[40]

As stated at the outset of this essay, James' philosophy merges with postmodernism on three fundamental issues. First, concurring with the most basic assumption of postmodernism, James exhibits a skepticism concerning purely objective truth — truth of a Cartesian flavor. This skepticism derives from a distinctly postmodern understanding of the contextual nature of knowledge described above. James implicitly rejects Descartes by suggesting that there exists no privileged, objective point of reference (to use my previous phrase, no Archimedean point of reference) from which to judge philosophical claims. Like the postmodernist, then, James hints at the inevitability of contextualized understandings of the world. At the beginning of *Pragmatism,* for example, James indicates that a philosopher's temperament necessarily influences and colors his or her judgment. James, therefore, casts off any pretension to neutrality. He writes:

> . . . of whatever temperament a professional philosopher is, he tries, when philosophizing, to sink the fact of his temperament. Temperament is no conventionally recognized reason, so he urges impersonal reasons only for his conclusions. Yet his temperament really gives him a stronger bias than any of his more strictly objective premises.[41]

Thus, the far-reaching influence of temperament precludes the possibility of objective premises and, consequently, objective conclusions as well. This all goes to say, then, that the concept of objective truth itself is questionable. James corroborates this in so many words when he writes: "The whole notion of truth, which naturally and without reflection we assume to mean the simple duplication by the mind of a ready-made and given reality, proves hard to understand clearly."[42] This sentence could very well be inserted into any primer on postmodernism; it delineates postmodernism's primary tenet. In fact, John Roth's explanation of James' concept of truth could very well pass for a descriptive comment on postmodernism. He writes: "Truth is not something absolute and fixed—to think so is moving to the level of unwarranted abstraction."[43]

Closely related to James' pessimism of objective truth is his uncanny, even eerie, anticipation of that dimension of

postmodernism known as perspectivalism. This, then, is yet another thread that connects James to postmodernism. Harold Heie defines perspectivalism as "the view that our claims to knowledge unavoidably reflect our particular perspectives as members of different interpretative communities."[44] Thus, not only can the temperament of a philosopher affect his or her judgments, but so can the perspective from which he or she judges as well. James provides perhaps his most explicit assent to perspectivalism (even though it had not yet at the time been developed into a specifically philosophical construct) when he writes: "What we say about reality thus depends on the perspective into which we throw it. The *that* of it is its own, but the *what* depends on the *which;* and the which depends on *us*" [italics in original].[45] James provides an example of this phenomenon by pointing to mathematics. He asserts: "You can take the number 27 as the cube of 3, or as the product of 3 and 9, or as 29 *plus* 1, or 100 *minus* 73, or in countless other ways, of which one will be just as true as another" [emphasis in original].[46] What is true, then, depends upon perspective. Philosophical judgments hinge upon perspective. James develops this idea in *Pragmatism;* postmodernists laud it as the first step in doing successful philosophy.

For James and postmodernists, however, perspectivalism indicates that something more than clever mathematical concepts is at stake. One might extrapolate from James' mathematical example to the much more radical claim that all of intellectual history is contingent upon perspective. Again, contrary to Descartes, one perspective need not be more true than any other perspective, just as 9 times 3 is not any more true than 31 minus 4. Instead, one perspective may be more *useful* given the intellectual, scientific, or societal context of a given community.[47] James employs this postmodern concept of perspective when he discusses scientific advancement. He writes:

> The Laws [of science] themselves, moreover, have grown so numerous that there is no counting them, and so many rival formulations are proposed in all the branches of science that investigators have become accustomed to the notion that no theory is absolutely a transcript of reality, but that any one of them may from some point of view be useful.[48]

In this regard, James seems to anticipate Thomas Kuhn, who in turn greatly influenced many postmodernists. Kuhn calls the changing of "transcripts of reality" that have transpired over the centuries "paradigm shifts." No paradigm is inherently superior to another; rather, each paradigm affords a more useful point of view for that community. Changing scientific theories, Kuhn contends, represent ". . . neither a decline nor a raising of standards, but simply a change demanded by the adoption of a new paradigm."[49] Thus, we can see how James explores a concept of perspectivalism that would later become the primary lens through which Kuhn and postmodernists visualize intellectual history.

A third commonality linking James and postmodernism emerges naturally from perspectivalism and represents what postmodernists believe to be the hopeful possibility of postmodernism in action: genuine conversation. As a consequence of modern/Enlightenment thought, certain interpretative communities were excluded from the philosophical court of arbitration due to their supposed empirical or rational inferiority. Such communities were simply left out of the conversation. As a result of perspectivalism, however, no community can be excluded. Again, no perspective is superior (at least on broadly empirical or rational grounds) to another; the categories of epistemological legitimacy have shifted dramatically. In postmodernism, then, and as a result of perspectivalism, conversation is paramount. Wendy MacCredie states: "[Perspectivalism] is a view that recognizes difference and *affirms* it. Just because we have different views does not mean we cannot talk to each other" [emphasis added].[50] Thus, postmodernism emphasizes an open line of conversation.

The importance of open conversation and free inquiry governs much of *Pragmatism*. Since (as I stated earlier) the possibility of conversation emerges naturally from perspectivalism, and since James adopts a strong form of perspectivalism, we can easily deduce the importance of conversation in James' philosophy. In line with the essence of postmodern conversation, James does not rule out any proposition *a priori*. Every proposition, in other words, deserves a hearing. James writes: "On pragmatic principles, we cannot reject any hypothesis if consequences useful to life flow from it."[51] Similarly, John Roth states that, in pragmatism, ". . . attempts to determine meaning need to be free, open, descriptive, and nonreductive."[52] Thus, it is evident that the method of pragmatism and the method of postmodernism merge

to form yet a third thread of continuity between James and the postmodernists.

Since these threads of continuity connect James and postmodernism, and since numerous other threads link James and Franklin, we can now address ourselves to the startling, though logical conclusion that a continuity of thought spans from Franklin, across approximately two centuries of intellectual history, straight into postmodernism. We must qualify this conclusion, however, by adding that the connection between Franklin and postmodernism is tentative, perhaps even sketchy and tenuous at times. But a thread of continuity between the two is clearly visible if we analyze the thought of Franklin as containing the seeds of postmodernism — or, to mix metaphors, if we recognize that the birth pangs of postmodernism exist in embryonic form in Franklin's philosophy. Analyzing in this light, we can detect, in hints and guesses, how some of Franklin's thoughts anticipate the intellectual revolution two centuries later.

Although often considered the quintessential man of the Enlightenment, Franklin often evidences a pessimism of the potential of knowledge and positivistic thinking. As we have already noted, Franklin resists positive affirmations and propositions asserted in a positive tone. According to Franklin, no one owns a monopoly on truth because truth is often slippery. To affirm a proposition positively with blithe self-assurance is to belie this fact. In this regard, then, Franklin borders on the postmodern attitude toward truth. Specifically, Franklin, like the postmodernists, seems to deflate Cartesian optimism in a universal and knowable truth. In a 1759 letter to Mary Stevenson, Franklin writes:

> And indeed all our Knowledge is so imperfect, and we are from a thousand Causes so perpetually subject to Mistake and Error, that Positiveness can scarce ever become even the most knowing; and Modesty in advancing any Opinion, however, plain and true we may suppose it, is always decent, and generally more likely to procure Assent.[53]

These thoughts reflect the temper of postmodernism—a modesty engendered by the awareness of the limitations of knowledge. We can see, then, how Franklin's awareness of these limitations helped pave the way for the postmodern conclusion that purely objective truth does not exist. The postmodern denial of objective

truth naturally proceeds from the Franklinian awareness of the limitations of knowledge. If we plotted the course of postmodernism, in other words, Franklin's thoughts could very well represent the launching point. Causality in intellectual history again enters the picture. Thoughts such as Franklin's were among the sufficient causes to propose the radical questions that molded postmodernism into what it is today. In this sense, then, a thread of continuity links Franklin and postmodernism.

If, as I have suggested, threads of continuity in intellectual history interweave with other threads, then we might expect Franklin to share other commonalities with postmodernists. This expectation is fulfilled when we notice that Franklin adopts a form of perspectivalism in his philosophy and theology. Here, as with James, threads interweave in the sense that perspectivalism is closely related, in fact, is almost a corollary, to a skepticism of objective truth. Franklin exhibits a perspectivalism similar in form to that of James and the postmodernists when he analyzes the various truth claims of the theological denominations of his day. He first considers the theology of a sect known as the "Dunkers" and then elucidates an analogy incorporating the image of fog. He writes:

> This Modesty in a Sect [the Dunkers] is perhaps a singular Instance in the History of Mankind, every other Sect supposing itself in Possession of all Truth, and that those who differ are so far in the Wrong: Like a Man travelling in foggy Weather: Those at some Distance before him on the Road he sees wrapped up in the Fog, as well as those behind him, and also the People in the Fields on each side, but near him all appears clear. Tho' in truth he is as much in the Fog as any of them.[54]

In this analogy, every man, as a result of the fog, can see within a circumscribed space. Such space that man attributes as truth. However, the "truthness" of that parameter of vision only results from that man's perspective. Moreover, visualizing the image holistically, we can see that every man is clouded in fog. Since the fog restricts the scope of vision, and since the fog is all-encompassing, all judgments depend upon perspective. In this respect, then, we can see how Franklin's illustration of the nature of theological truth is distinctly postmodern.

Not surprisingly, Franklin's thought consequently develops the same pattern found in postmodernism. The nature of perspectivalism readily lends itself to the type of open conversation discussed earlier. Thus, perspectivalism and conversation interweave in both Franklinian and postmodern thought. Franklin appeals to open conversation and free inquiries when he sketches an outline of his Sect of the Free and Easy. He searches for commonalities among American citizens that would be conducive to promoting harmony and benevolence in an open society. After enumerating the basic tenets of all religions, he writes:

> . . . these I esteem'd the Essentials of every Religion, and being to be found in all Religions we had in our Country I respected them all, tho' with different degrees of Respect as I found them more or less mix'd with other Articles which without any Tendency to inspire, promote or confirm Morality, serv'd principally to divide us & make us unfriendly to one another.[55]

Perhaps implicitly recognizing the nature of perspectivalism, Franklin attempts to reach beyond the metaphorical fog and unite American citizens in the spirit of friendliness.[56] Franklin's method of achieving this goal is founded upon the hope shared by many postmodernists: a genuine conversation founded not upon rigidity and exclusion, but open-mindedness and receptivity. For this reason, Alfred Owen Aldridge writes that ". . . tolerance and humanitarianism were the only continuously and unchanging dogmas in [Franklin's] creed."[57] These same qualities govern postmodern conversation today.

It is possible, therefore, to detect elements of postmodernism in the philosophy of Franklin. Or, perhaps better put, it is possible to detect elements of Franklin's philosophy in postmodernism. Either way, the threads of continuity illustrate the continuous nature of intellectual history. As we have seen, in many ways, the ideas of Franklin fit congruously with the ideas of James, which, in turn, fit congruously with postmodern ideas. Moreover, the commonalities linking Franklin, James, and postmodernists form a vast fabric of interweaving threads, which crisscross between each thinker in elaborate, sometimes surprising ways. And as these threads interweave, ideas span centuries, and American intellectual history is made.

[1]John Higham,"American Intellectual History: A Critical Approach," *American Quarterly* 13.2 (1961): 219-233.

[2]Bruce Kuklich, "Introduction to William James' *Pragmatism*." *Pragmatism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. xiii.

[3]William James, *Pragmatism* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), p. 9.

[4]*Ibid*, p. 18.

[5]Donald H. Meyer, "Franklin's Religion." *Critical Essays on Benjamin Franklin*. Ed. James Nagel (Boston: G. K. Hill & Company, 1987), p. 151.

[6]*Pragmatism*, p. 92.

[7]Jacques Barzun, *A Stroll with William James* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1983), p. 85.

[8]*Pragmatism*, p. 37.

[9]Meyer, "Franklin's Religion," p. 151.

[10]*Pragmatism*, p. 51.

[11]*Ibid.*, p. 36

[12]Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 260.

[13]Alfred Owen Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin and Nature 's God* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1967), p. 10.

[14]*Pragmatism*, p. 13.

[15]*Ibid.*, p. 28.

[16]*Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

[17]*Autobiography*, p. 101.

[18]*Pragmatism*, p. 46.

[19]*Autobiography*, p. 102.

[20]*Ibid.*, p. 109.

[21]Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin and Nature's God*, p. 259.

[22]*Pragmatism*, p. 32.

[23]John Roth, *Freedom and the Moral Life* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), p. 95.

[24]*Autobiography*, p. 39.

[25]Meyer, "Franklin's Religion," p. 153.

[26]Qtd. in Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin and Nature 's God*, p. 8.

[27]Kenneth Silverman, "Introduction to Franklin's *Autobiography*," *The Autobiography and Other Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1986), p. xii.

[28]John M. Russell, "Meliorism: The World View of William James," *Religious Humanism* 21.2 (1987): 77-80.

[29]*Pragmatism*, p. 57.

[30]Barzun, *A Stroll with William James*, pp. 85-86.

[31]*Autobiography*, p. 233.

[32]Nancey Murphy, "Philosophical Resources for Postmodern Evangelical Theology," *Christian Scholar 's Review* 26.2 (1997): 184-205.

[33]Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*. Trans. F. E. Sutcliffe (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 43.

[34]*Ibid*, p. 103.

[35]William Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), pp. 26, 29.

[36]Concerning linguist conceptual schemes, for example, Richard Rorty writes: "Since truth is a property of sentences, since sentences are dependent for their existence upon vocabularies, and since vocabularies are made by human beings, so are truths." *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 21.

[37]Placher, *Unapologetic Theology*, p. 27.

[38]Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), p. 56.

[39]Stephen T. Davis, "Christianity, Philosophy, and Mulitculturalism." *Christian Scholar 's Review* 25.4 (1996): 394-408.

[40]Hans-Georg Gadamer, "What is Truth?" *Hermeneutics and Truth.* Ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1994), p. 41.

[41]*Pragmatism*, p. 8.

[42]*Ibid.* p. 87.

[43]Roth, *Freedom*, p. 98. Notice again how threads of continuity interweave. This time, James' distrust of abstraction, which, as we have seen, links him to Franklin, becomes a component of his similarities to postmodern thought.

[44]Harold Heie, "The Postmodern Opportunity: Christians in the Academy." *Christian Scholar 's Review* 26.2 (1997): 138- 157.

[45]*Pragmatism*, p. 111.

[46]*Ibid.*, p. 113.

[47]Again, threads interweave. A given community apprehends utility or beneficial pragmatic consequences according to its own perspective. Pragmatism and perspectivalism are, indeed, interweaving threads.

[48]*Pragmatism*, p. 30.

49Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 107.

[50]Qtd. in James Barcus, "Religion in the Post-modern Academy: Trials, Tribulations, and Possibilities." Teaching Religiously Oriented Literature in the Secular University Forum. South Central Conference on Christianity and Literature. Lafayatte Hollidome, Louisiana. 1 Feb. 1997.

[51]*Pragmatism*, p. 123. Threads interweave again. Conversation is connected to perspectivalism is connected to pragmatism.

[52]Roth, *Freedom*, p. 94.

[53]*Autobiography*, p. 251.

[54]*Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

[55]*Ibid.*, p. 89.

[56]We can detect three interweaving threads here. Franklin spurns a rigid dogmatism (1) because it can discourage conversation (2), which can eventuate in positive pragmatic consequences (3).

[57]Aldridge, *Franklin and Nature 's God*, p 11.